



CHAPTER I.  
SIMPLY WONDERFUL.

**M**AYBE you've heard of books that packed such a terrific wallop that they knocked kings, queens, and princes for a goal, tomes that have turned plumbers into presidents, senators into scenario writers, firemen into financiers, and stenographers into Mary Pickfords. But how about a book that could make a flock of sideshow freaks quit the white tops and start out to conquer the world for themselves? Creeping codfish, try and imagine that!

To show you what a lot of damage a blank cartridge can do, let us take the case of John Alonzo Wickpick, the party of the first part. There are a bevy of other parts, and that's not another story—it's this one!

I was managing the kid show with The World of Fun Carnival, all of which was a shade easier than racing caterpillars over flypaper. Now to get down to brass tacks, as the hammer remarked to the carpenter.

The show opened the season at a slab entitled Live Stock, Nebraska, the same being a duck-in-and-duck-out burg consisting of a post office, a windmill, and a bunch of hay. A few minutes before we opened the sideshow I noticed a serious-looking chap trip over a guy rope and sprawl at my brown shoes. Joe Sweeney, the great—according to himself—ballyhoo speaker, assisted the acrobat to his feet and then let forth a giggle.

"Never mind, brother," said Joe, "they all fall for our sideshow. What other tricks d'yer know?"

"Er—beg your pardon?" returned the bimbo, smiling. "I'm afraid that my introduction was a little bit ludicrous, eh, what?"

"Clever bit of clowning," answered Joe with a grin. "With a little more practice—"

"Here's the trunk that you dropped," I put in, handing the bird a briefcase. "What's it all about, if anything?"

"I can see readily that you are both intelligent men," he replied. "Both of the intellectual type, I dare say."

"I bet you're an ex-showman," muttered Joe, snorting. "Your spiel sounds like familiar apple sauce."

The stranger ignored Joe's doubtful wit, dived into his brief case, and came up with a little red book. He fondled it to his breast for a moment, looked toward heaven, or maybe it was only toward the moon, then inhaled ecstatically. "I have here something that is needed by every ambitious man in America!" he exclaimed.

"Pour some out!" Joe begged.

"This tome you see in my hand," went on the orator, "is guaranteed to awaken folks to their fullest powers of accomplishment. In fact gentlemen, it is the greatest mental stimulator that the world has ever known!"

"Hot Rover!" hooted Joe. "Mister, you sure shake a mean tongue!"

"Yes, gentlemen; this innocent-looking book has aroused hundreds of men from the depths of discouragement and dark despair!" continues Mr. Whiskers. "A tome, incidentally, that shall soon be endorsed by all the prominent people in the country. Think of it!"

"What did P. T. Barnum have to say about it, hey?" demanded the tactless Joe.

"And what, you rightly ask, can this wonderful book be? Some magic legerdemain, some quack nostrum, or pallid panacea? No—a thousand times

no!”

“Then what is it?” I inquired calmly.

“Maybe it’s a new crossword puzzle,” guessed Joe.

Before continuing with his ballyhoo, as we remark on the lots, the newcomer removed his 1888 fedora and placed it on the bally stand. Then he extracted another red book from the briefcase and asked Joe to hold it.

“Sir,” he began, after taking a deep breath, “you now have in your hands the key to success, the open sesame to wealth, fame, and glory! The magic wand that will arouse you from your present indolence, an indolence that now has you bound to the uncertainties of the show world. Surely you wish to become awakened to your latent powers, do you not?”

Joe evidently did not. He blinked his eyes, wiggled his ears, then sniffed. “Ring off, kid,” he replied, “I got your number. You’re one of those wisecracking book agents. My mamma never raised no foolish children. Toodle-oo!” After which, Joe turned on his rubber heel and blew into the tent.

“Guess I’ll be leaving, too, professor,” I said. “There ain’t no book in the world that could wake up a beezark like me. Come around with some dynamite and try your luck. S’long!”

“Ah, but, my dear sir,” he cried, “if you but knew of the wonderful inspirational messages contained in ‘It’s Great to Be Great’ by John Alonzo Wickpick, I feel sure that you would gladly pay at least one hundred dollars for a copy! But I do not ask for such a sum. All that I ask—”

“Sorry,” I cut him off, “but I got to go over to the treasury now and kid the ‘Old Man’ into giving me some advance for some of the sideshow attractions. Bonsoir!”

“Er—just a moment,” he pleaded. “Will you permit me to enter the tent and have a chat with some of the show folks? It cannot do any harm, you know, and it might do a world of good. In fact, I feel sure that it will!”

“Go ahead,” I snapped. “But, take it from me, if you can peddle anything in the line of litterchoor to those stoneheads on the exhibition platforms, you’re a pip!”

“Thanks awfully.” He blew into the tent.

On my way back from the treasury wagon, after a corking battle with the Old Man, I encountered Mr. Book J. Agent once again.

“Ah, there you are!” he exclaimed. “As you may observe, my sample case is empty of books. Unfortunately, I had only five copies of the masterpiece with me. However, your compatriots were intelligent enough to purchase all that I had in stock. They are a very alert set of men and women, I assure you. And, if you’ll pardon the observation—which is well meant—you might take an example from them. I bid you good day, sir!”

“Wait a minute, Oswald!” I hollered. “Let me get you right. Did I understand you to say that them freaks, in that kid show, bought books?”

“That’s exactly what I mean,” he replied. “The—er—Fat Lady bought one; the Sword Swallower bought another; the Human Skeleton thought it was wonderful; the—”

“Great!” I had to laugh. “I guess they thought they were frankfurters, not books. What did they say they was gonna do with ‘em—use ‘em for pillows?”

“Your levity is unwarranted,” he returned suavely. “They are to study the world of wisdom and inspiration contained in the pages of the volume in their spare moments. Who knows, perhaps within your institution of strange, odd, and curious people from all parts of the world, there may be some latent genius who, once awakened to the real magnitude of a suppressed ambition, will go forth, like Alexander, and conquer the world! I tell you, sir, it is possible; I tell you that, with a copy of ‘It’s Great to Be Great,’ by John Alonzo Wickpick, in one’s possession, a man may scale the heights of everlasting glory and success; with it a man may reach the high Olympian—”

I went away from there.

## CHAPTER II.

### A COUPLE OF DIZZY ONES.

**I**DASHED into the tent and noted that the boys and girls were all set to give the show—all except Nicodemo, the Worlds’ Premier Sword Swallower. Nick had his left leg sticking over the side of his platform, his right dangling over the arm of the chair, while what passed for his mind was absorbed in a little red book.

“Hello, Nick!” I opened up. “I see that you’re going in for the higher education. What’s it all about?”

On seeing me, he looked bored, peeved, and annoyed.

"D'yer wish to see me about anything important?" he asked sourly, gazing at me as if I was a complete set of nothing, handsomely bound in cheesecloth. "If not, Mr. Bailey, I wish to say that I'm busy. I ain't got any too much time for study, now, so kindly don't annoy me. From now on I gotta put in a hour a day on this book. It's great stuff, if you got any brains!"

"Boy, you amuse me!" I tossed back. "What fortuneteller told you that you had any brains? Stop kidding yourself."

"You talk like a regular fathead!" he snorted. "If you know how to read—which same I doubt—come here a minute. D'yer see this here book? Well, I bought it off a bimbo who breezed in here a little while ago. He sold some of the other birds a copy, too, but it won't do 'em any good. You gotta have heavy brains to get the big idea. Sit down and I'll read what it says in the first chapter."

"Be yourself!" I hooted. "I ain't no audience. Toodle-oo!"

Well, to dwarf a tall story, the show opened and everything went along a shade better than good. The customers hopped in at a dime a hop, and business looked far from being a bloomer. Then things took a turn for the worse, as the quack remarked to his patient.

A few moments before we open, the next day, I was sitting on the bally stand, busy doing assorted nothing, when I felt a tap on the shoulder. Whirling around, I saw no less than "Major" Malone, the Human Skeleton. The Major was a bit thinner than an 1823 dime and weighed just enough to keep him from leaving the ground.

"How are you, 'Doc'?" he began with a smug smile on his thin pan. "Hope you're well, because I got some punk news for you!"

"That's all you ever keep in stock!" I flung back. And that's a fact. He was as happy as a fox bareback riding on a porcupine, if you know what I mean. "See this book?" he went on, flashing a little red tome.

"What about it?"

"Well, it's been the turning point in my life; that's what about it!" he whooped. "I only read the first three chapters so far, but it has woke me up to the fact that I have been a terrible sucker for spending all them years in the show business; I might of been a president of a bank, or sumpin'."

"You and me both!" I agreed, kidding him along. "However, due to the odd shape of our

knobs—"

"Don't worry 'bout the shape of my head," he shot back. "If I had one like yours I could pose for a horse. Never mind the cheap comedy; I'm serious! I have decided to quit this tough game of trouping and make a big bird outta myself. See if you can get a giggle outta that!"

"Atta boy, Major!" I said. "Go to it, old kid. But you got some job ahead of you, all right. Stay away from Chinatown—you're loaded with hop. First thing you know you'll be challenging Jack Dempsey."

"Think I'm kidding, hey?" he barked. "Well, I'm gonna quit this show tomorrow. Maybe you can laugh that off!"

"What do you intend to do at the start—run for president?"

"Never can tell, Doc. The book says that a man can be whatever he thinks he can be. D'yer understand that, or are you just plain dumb?"

"Just plain dumb," I returned. "In the meantime, forget it! Just run in the tent, hop upon your platform, and get ready to give a show. If you ever quit this game you'd starve to death. Blow away, boy!"

Of course, I didn't take the Major seriously. A sideshow manager is used to hearing that sort of applied apple sauce for breakfast, dinner, and supper. Absolute peace would be such a novelty that the strain alone would send me to a bats-in-the-belfry hotel.

Besides, I figured that the little runt was just fishing for a raise, a habit they all have, same as plumbers, bricklayers, and congressmen. So I sat down again on the bally stand and prepared to forget all about it. Not so good! A moment later, Lulu Little, known to the profession as The Mountain of Flesh, wobbled out of the tent and sat beside me.

"Lo, Doc, dear!" she said with a titter. All fat girls titter in the show business. That's about all the exercise they get.

"Hello, Maggie!" I said. Her right name is Maggie McHoy. "What's that collection of bound paper you got under your wing? Did you get stuck on one of them fool books, too?"

"Doc," she replied, fluttering, "I come out here to tell you that I'm leaving this show flat on its shoulder blades at the end of the week! I been reading this here book, and it says that I should ought to make the most out of my young life. So I

have decided to come to life and be a tragedian on the legitimate stage. I have latent powers, I have!”

Sizzling spaniel!

“Best wishes,” I said. “You should make one peach of an actress, Maggie. That is, if you don’t drop through the stage floor into the cellar. If you’re a perfect thirty-six, then an elephant is a skeleton!”

“Is that so?” she flared. “What if I am a little plump? That ain’t got nothing to do with brains, has it?”

“Well, fat has interfered with my brains something terrible!” I snapped back.

“D’yer mean to hint that I got any fat in my brains?” she howled.

And so she left me.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OFF TO WIN.

**D**URING the next few days everything went along as smoothly as snails over glue highways. The boys and girls in the show paid less attention to me than if I were an iron marshmallow. When I took the liberty to call ‘em down, or even up, they smiled superiorly and suggested that I find the nearest exit and take my share of the air.

At last, Tim Mackensie, the Old Man, sent for me to call on him at the treasury wagon. When I arrived, I saw that he looked as happy as a cat with a tin mouse. He was just totally disgusted.

“What’s going on in your joint, hey?” he yelped, right off the bat. “I been told that the freaks do as they please, as often as they please, and what this trick is built upon is—er—dis-dis’pline. Get me? Why, three of your birds had the nerve to come in here last night and say they wanna quit. Yeah—quit! And— well, what d’yer know about the mess, hey?”

Right away I happened to think about a little red book hatched out by John Alonzo Wickpick. “Boss,” I replied, “I am sure that a book is causing all the riot. Sure, a book, see?”

“A—what?” he demanded, chewing his cigar.

“A book,” I repeated. “Some wisecracking book agent walks into the trap the other day and peddles it to the bunch. It sure has put a lot of peculiar ideas into their nuts, I’ll tell you that! They’re beginning to wake up, or at least think they are.”

“Say, what the Barnum kinda book could wake

them up, huh?” he asked, puzzled. “I never knew they was eddicated, like me and you. What’s it all about, anyway?”

“Don’t ask me about that!” I answered. “I ain’t hardly seen the book, myself, but I know positively that it’s busting up the party, and that’s that.”

“I tell you what you do, Doc,” he remarked reflectively. “You grab yourself a copy and see what it is. If there is something that ain’t right, I’ll fix it, even if I have to knock their blocks off. Just leave it to me. First in war, last in peace, yours for trouble, Tim Mackensie. Beat it!”

I rushed back to the tent and saw Joe Sweeney, my ballyhoo talker, doing a Rip van Winkle on the platform.

“Ballyhoo!” I shouted in his ear. “Come on and wake up—it’s time to give a show. I got plenty to worry about besides you!”

Joe got up leisurely and stretched with both hands. “Don’t be so bossy,” he said with a yawn, as he caressed a little red book. “Besides which, I ain’t counting on delivering any more openings to the natives at thirty-five bucks per weekly. What’s more, I have just jumped to the conclusion that I have been a grade-A boob for working for anybody—except myself. Try and get a smile outta that!”

“So you’re going nutty, too, eh?” I shot back. “Gonna work for yourself, huh? If that ever happens, Joseph, my boy, the almshouse will receive another customer within a few weeks. To be a success, your head is the wrong shape!”

“This here book,” went on Joe, paying no attention to me, “which I borrows from Nicodemo, is jammed full of hot stuff. I’ll say it is! If you’ll keep your trap shut for a minute, I’ll read to you what it says in Chapter Seven entitled, ‘The World Is Your Oyster—Open It!’ Listen, dummy, to what it says.

“The immortals of the world are they who think deeper or more brilliantly than their fellows. The sawdust king, François O’Levy, attributed his rise largely to a thought that came to him when he was a young man. He believed that he could do for sawdust what Roscoe G. Hooey did with amalgamated pitch. And Patrick McCohen, the distilled-water king, says, ‘My advice to young men is to read a lot, think a lot, and work a lot. I started out that way. I kept on thinking, and I’m still thinking. A man either goes forward or backward.’”

"What's the title of that bedtime story?" I asked. "Sounds funny to me! Who wrote it—Charlie Chaplin? Besides, what do you get out of it?"

Joe looked pained. "Listen to 'im!" he fumed. "I bet you just use your head to keep your ears apart. What do I get out of it, hey? Well, I'll show you! I intend to quit this bunk-blowing business I'm in and strike out and do something big. D'yer hear me—big! Furthermore and to wit, you can grab my resignation right now. And that's that!"

Old John Alonzo Wickpick shook a wicked pen, I thought. "Er—just a moment, Joe!" I pleaded. "Let's have a slant at that boob awakener, will you? I might get a kick out of it myself!"

"Sure!" he said, passing it over. "But I don't think it will do you any good, if you studied it for a century. Your head ain't the right shape. Au reservoir, Doc!"

Well, as the oil drillers are wont to remark, after the show that night I took the little red book and prepared to read it in my hotel suite, meaning one room. It was a wow! Before I concluded the third chapter, I began to wonder why birds like Hannibal, Cleopatra, Steve Brody, and Jesse James had anything on me. Why couldn't I do the same? In fact, the bozo who wrote the book, John Alonzo Wickpick, claimed that I could.

In the next chapter, he told about humble birds who flew to the top branches of the tree of success, via work, nerve, and pluck. They never had any luck, of course. He told about the career of the famous Ebenezer van Murphy.

Van Murphy, it seemed, started out in life with nothing more than a set of legs, a pair of eyes, and the correct amount of hands. At the rare and tender age of ten he was hoofed out of the family mansion, the same being a log cabin in the foothills of the Bozark Mountains. Ebenezer's pop—meaning father—told the kid to go out and root for himself.

He did! He started off by picking strawberries to earn enough to pay his way to the Great City, which is liable to mean New York, and he reached same in due time. At the age of ten, he was the chief errand boy for the Greater City Canned Parsnip Corporation. At eighteen, he was the third assistant manager and going strong.

He reached twenty and the manager's job at the same time. After that it was all peaches for little Ebenezer! By paying strict attention to his duties and passing up all forms of pleasure, including crap

shooting, he wound up, at the age of twenty-eight, as the chief cook and bottle bather of the company.

Well, after reading the case of Ebenezer van Murphy and the similar successful feats of a number of other great boys and girls, I turned out the light and crawled into the hay. Before morning, believe me, I did some heavy dreaming.

In fact, I spent the entire slumber period in dreaming of empires, millions, fast motah cars, mansions in Newport, butlers, forty blond housemaids, not to mention, though that's what I'm doing, the Greater City Canned Parsnip Corporation. John Alonzo Wickpick sure had the right dope.

Next morning I dashed down to the lot and observed six of my prize freaks trouping out of the treasury, with the Old Man hurling Mr. Anathema after 'em. Right away I suspected a mice. Nicodemo, the Sword Swallower, was leading the flock, followed by Lulu Little, the spare-flesh lady; after her came Major Malone, the Human Skeleton and the rest.

"S'long, Doc!" opened up Nick. "We're all through trouping! And we're gonna start some business for ourselves. You can't keep good men and girls down, see? Just told Old Man Mackensie that he could blow up and bust. Hope you wake up yourself, some day. By, Doc!"

Away they trouped.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### LOUD YELLS.

THE next town we played was laboring under the thirst-quenching name of Cider Gap, a jump of twelve miles from Live Stock. I was obliged to open the sideshow with only four freaks, the others having gone west, thanks to a little red book. And maybe the customers didn't put up a howl! Ten great and distinctive sideshow attractions were advertised on the banners, and when the natives failed to note them on the inside—hot mongrel!—what they told me as they passed out! Not that I blame 'em.

As to the jovial Old Man, he spent most of his waking hours in telling me and the world in general what he would do if he ever laid his paws on the book agent who sold the freaks the printed dynamite. Nothing like that had ever happened to Tim Mackensie before—or since.

On the fourth day business was dead enough to

attract the undivided attention of an undertaker. In disgust, I walked down to the treasury wagon to have a chat with the Old Man. As I came near, I heard some loud talking. Somebody was losing his temper and didn't want anybody to find it for him.

"So you're the fathead who sold them red books to the kid-show freaks, huh?" It was the voice of the Old Man, and he has some voice when he's peeved. "D'yer realize that you made a bum outta the show, hey? And then you got the nerve to come around here and ask me to give you a job! Woof—wait till I get a crack at you!"

The next second I saw Mr. Book J. Agent come hurtling out the door, with the boot and fists of the Old Man following closely. The poor mackerel landed in a neat pile on the grass.

"And another thing," added the Old Man. "If I ever get my mitts on that bird, John Alonzo Wickpick, I'll ring his neck so he won't be able to write another book for forty years!"

Before replying, the book agent got off the ground, brushed some assorted sawdust off his clothes, then said to the Old Man with great dignity: "Sir, you now have the honor of beholding the author of the book, John Alonzo Wickpick!"

Oh, Barnum—where is thy sting?

#### CHAPTER V. GREATEST OF ALL.

**W**HEN we arrived at Shin Center, the next show stand, the sideshow was a sorry-looking mess. We certainly missed those six ambitious freaks, no fooling. Then the dark clouds rolled by, the sun came out—and in walked our old friend, John Alonzo Wickpick.

It was the third day at Shin Center, and the Old Man and me were feeling a shade bluer than ten acres of Cuban sky. While we both sat in the treasury wagon, thinking deep-indigo thoughts, the door opened and in bobbed the author of "It's Great to Be Great." When the Old Man got one peek at him, he made a lurch with clenched fists, but I held him back.

"What!" snorted Tim Mackensie. "Have you got the crust to come here again? For two cents—"

"Gentlemen," began Wickpick, using a well-modulated voice, "I came to ask your pardon, not to antagonize. I have made a grievous mistake and have done, I'm afraid, incalculable harm to some of your show folk."

"I'll say you did!" howled the Old Man. "And why I don't beat—"

"Bear with me a moment, I beg of you," he pleaded. "I promise to be brief. My mission here today is not in behalf of myself, but in the interests of the ladies and gentlemen who, after reading my unfortunate book, were lured away to disastrous pastures. Gentlemen, they have appointed me as their spokesman, and I am here to beg you to reinstate them to their former positions."

"Never!" yelled the Old Man. "First in war, last in peace—slam, bang, bing!—yours for trouble, Tim Mackensie!"

"Wait a minute, boss," I whispered in his ear. "We need those attractions like we need our noses. If this dizzy clown can lure 'em back—for the love of Pete, take them!"

"It seems that they did not find success quite as easy as I had pictured it," went on Wickpick. "I met them at the railroad station about an hour ago, and they held me responsible for their plight. Gentlemen, they are right! Therefore, I think it is my duty to use my powers of forensic oratory to the end that they get their former berths back again. Remember, gentlemen, that Antony forgave Brutus, Josephine forgave the Emperor Napoleon, Nero forgave—"

Well, to make a short story shorter, he kept up a wonderful flow of language for the next fifteen minutes. Talk about the late Mr. Demosthenes wielding a wicked tongue! Demosthenes be blowed—John Alonzo Wickpick would have made that old Greek look tongue-tied.

"Aw right," grunted the Old Man, at the end of the oratory. "Bring the chumps around; maybe I'll talk to 'em!"

Wickpick went to the door, extracted a trick whistle from his pocket, then gave three sharp blasts. From beyond a hedge, a hundred yards away, six familiar heads bobbed up and smiled sheepishly. Led by Nicodemo and Major Malone, they tramped up silently to the Old Man with heads bowed.

For a moment, Tim Mackensie looked at his meek and humble freaks, a whimsical expression on his tanned face. "So you're back again, you rambling rovers!" he growled. Then he smiled faintly. "Aw right—I'll give you another chance. And you can thank the great tongue of Mr. Wickpick for it all. If it wasn't for the way he talked—"

“Three cheers for Mr. Wickpick!” shouted Nicodemo.

They gave him forty, not three.

“I thank you all!” Wickpick blushed. “Especially you, Mr. Mackensie.” Then, in a softer voice, he said: “And now I must leave you all. In fact, I intend to look for a position.”

“Wait a minute, kid,” remarked the Old Man, a twinkle in his eye. “So you’re gonna look for a job, hey? Well, speaking of jobs, I have a idea that

you’ll make the greatest ballyhoo talker the show world has ever known. How’ll fifty a week to start suit you, what?”

“Fine!” Wickpick beams. “This is, indeed, a pleasant turn of affairs. Thanks awfully!”

Did he make good? Listen! Ask any showman who is the greatest ballyhoo orator in the game, and he’ll say, “John Alonzo Wickpick, of The World of Fun Carnival!”